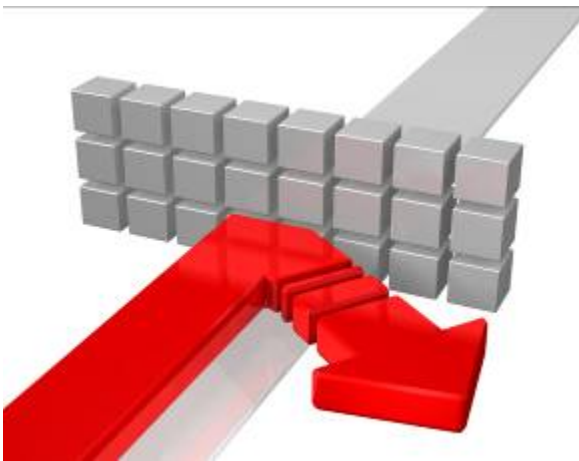




3 Common Mistakes Technical Professionals Make When Leading Others

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Do you remember your first job as a manager? I was thinking about my first management position recently. I was 27 years old and had been working in an advertising agency for 6 years. I worked in the media planning department and my job as a media planner involved accounting for how we'd spend hundreds of thousands and millions of dollars of a client budget. I was responsible for placing advertising that would reach their target market, giving their product exposure and the potential for sales.

I really loved my job as a media planner. There was a good balance of detailed work and creativity. Most of all, I loved what I was learning, and because of this I was passionate about my job, and very effective.

Have you ever felt really great about what you were doing, and valued for what you were contributing? I was certainly feeling this way after receiving three pay rises in one year without having to ask! I was being rewarded simply for loving what I was learning and doing.

Then the call came from a headhunter (a recruitment firm) about a media manager position with another advertising agency. I was flattered but didn't feel I was ready to take that step yet. The headhunter requested I meet with the client once and then decide. So I met with the media director of the advertising agency. He was so convinced about my suitability for the role because he'd heard from colleagues and media people that I was good at what I did. But I knew I was still very green and not ready for managing a team.

Have you ever had someone believe in you, more than you believe in yourself? Over the next 10 months, the media director kept calling and we'd talk about what I would need to feel ready to take on the position. He believed I was ready for a manager role. He was persistent and eventually I agreed because I had been clear with him that I would need a lot of support to move in to a management role and he agreed to personally supply that support.

So I started at my new job and within a week I inquired with the deputy media director as to where his boss was. He said he'd left on an extended overseas business trip and wouldn't be back for some weeks and would be mainly out of the office for the next 3 months. I was flabbergasted! He hadn't told me he was going. And where was my support that he had repeatedly promised? The deputy media director seemed to have no idea about what his boss had promised me and I received little support from him. Geez, I had a really bad feeling about this.

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**I quickly learned what I already knew; that I wasn't ready to be a manager.** But here I was and I had to make the most of it. To make matters worse, I was supposed to be an inspiration and a guide to my team of 5 people. What? I had no idea how to do that. I felt completely lost. People were now relying on me for answers, and expecting me to be a role model for them. I felt stressed, I couldn't sleep and I was unhappy. My previous boss had said I could come back at any time, but I wanted to make this work, so I stayed.

Now, here's the kicker. I had been hired because the agency had won a \$20 million account, but after nearly a year the agency realized they were losing money, and the client was unhappy along with agency personnel working on the account, so the agency and client mutually agreed to resign the account. It was a huge decision. So I was laid off.

**Talk about a career bust! I had gone from being in love with my job as an individual contributor, feeling valued and appreciated as a team member, to feeling like a complete failure as a manager.** The one bright spot was that I had been given my first management training based on "The One Minute Manager" by Ken Blanchard (now I'm dating myself!) and I had been exposed to the concept of 'catching people doing something right.' That was a completely foreign concept to me at the time. After I got over the shock of being laid off – which felt like a polite word for being fired in this case – I took stock and realized I had so much to learn about motivating and leading people.

**I was great as a technician in my job, but I was unprepared for the responsibilities of leading a team.** No one had told me that my job was now to inspire my team, and to encourage and to grow their abilities so they would be ready to take on more and different responsibilities. There was no leadership development training being offered. The truth is I didn't even know that as a manager I was also seen as a leader. I didn't know what I didn't know!

I made a decision to put my own money down and learn about people and what made a good manager, and most importantly to learn about myself. So I enrolled in numerous personal and professional development courses. I transitioned to being an entrepreneur and hired people to work in the corporate communications consulting firm that I co-founded. I kept applying what I learned from the courses I was taking, to the real world of my team. **It was a steep learning curve and I wish I'd had a mentor to help make my learning curve easier.**

Then the coaching profession began to take off and I enrolled in a professional coaches training program. That is where I learned how to listen, the art of asking powerful questions, how to give direct communication, the elements of effective feedback, and much, much more.

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That coach training program was in 1998 and I've been working with executives, managers, supervisors and entrepreneurs ever since. I have a particular affinity for working with engineers, technology and technical experts who want or need to maximize their leadership performance. I have worked with over 1000 people and counting.

Unfortunately its not just new managers who are in need of training about the distinctions between leading a team and managing a team. I've worked with many very senior managers and executives who haven't been trained or learned how to shift from managing to leading. Just ask a human resources person how much it really costs the company to replace a person who is dissatisfied, feels undervalued, and has little rapport with their manager. The tangible and intangible costs are huge!

I still have a fascination with what it takes to be a great leader, and you can benefit from what I've learned and avoid making the same mistakes that I did. **No matter if you are a new or experienced manager, I guarantee you there are things about your way of relating with others, or your way of thinking, or your way of addressing emotional content that could be improved.** You can more positively impact the people around you, and simultaneously increase productivity, satisfaction, and improve the bottom line.

On the following pages, I've outlined what I've discovered to be three common mistakes that technical people make when they are leading others. There are actions you can experiment with too.

If you have any feedback for me, or want to discuss your leadership challenge, please do email me at carly@stellarleader.com, or call me on 949 716 9265.

Yours in success,

Carly Anderson

President, Master Certified Coach
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### 3 Common Mistakes Technical Professionals Make When Leading Others

First, I want to share a couple of definitions with you. Every position called “manager” has responsibility for two distinctly different roles - as a manager and a leader. They manage processes and lead people. Leaders have formal positions such as being executives, managers, supervisors, or leaders of a thought process. Leaders have responsibility and authority to influence others. The most defining set of characteristics of a leader is how they interact with others. A stellar leader is one that has the ability to consistently bring about star performance in themselves and others, for the betterment of the individual, the team, and the organization.

As a leader, you already realize you have a good deal of power. What most leaders need to learn is how to manage their own and others’ responses to their power and authority. Failure to own your power in a balanced way and to recognize the impact you have on people’s actions, perceptions, and emotions can cause you to be a less effective leader. That’s a bold statement, so let’s go into the first common mistake that inhibits stellar leadership performance, and see if you agree.

#### Common Mistake #1

##### You focusing on the ‘what’ of leadership and ignore ‘how’ you lead

What a leader is supposed to do is scan the environment, build a strategy, organize, execute and manage resources to get the job done. Obviously you have to be talented, smart, and experienced to lead a complex organization. You have to understand stakeholders, the environment, your technology, and your numbers. However cognitive intelligence (IQ) is simply baseline. **In other words, you have to be smart to get in the door but that alone doesn’t make you a stellar leader.**

You can have a brilliant strategy and reach goals and be considered a pretty good leader. But employee engagement surveys and dissatisfied high performers who leave tell us that focusing mostly on the ‘what’ is no longer enough. **It’s how you lead that makes the difference between being a good and a stellar leader.** More on the how of leadership in a moment, but firstly, what has a manager focus so much on the ‘what’ of leadership? There are three reasons;

1. They have been rewarded as a star performer for what they have accomplished, stemming back to when they were an individual contributor and their individual performance was what gained them kudos and recognition.

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2. They have had bosses in the past that focused exclusively on strategy and execution so that is what they believe they need to focus on to be a good leader.
3. The organization has focused on the 'what' in performance reviews; therefore if it isn't measured then it isn't even on a leader's radar as being important.

Cliff was an extremely talented person. He knew how to set a plan, how to execute the plan and how to measure results. By all measures, he was doing a great job as a leader of a team of technical experts. Then one day his boss called him in to his office and explained that there were complaints from his people; that his team members didn't feel valued, and senior members felt that their expertise was being underutilized. Cliff was shocked. The team was hitting all their numbers and even exceeding expectations. How could his boss tell him he wasn't doing a fantastic job? And how come some of his people were complaining to his boss rather than speaking to him?

What Cliff had done was focus on the 'what' and neglected to spend equal or more effort on the 'how' of leading his team. He wasn't spending time on getting to know his team members, nor stretching them to be creative. He wasn't adapting his leadership style to the talents and experience of individual team members. He was treating everyone pretty much the same, regardless of experience, motivation and skill level, and this had led to dissatisfaction.

Cliff and I worked together to gather more data through interviews and assessments, so that Cliff had a more complete picture of his current leadership style and the perception he was creating. He then devised a plan for addressing the way he was leading. This included having individual conversations with team members, understanding what they were capable of, and what they needed from him in terms of belief in them. He also needed to learn to distinguish when something a team member requested was something he could agree to, or not. Mostly, Cliff really began to listen deeply to what his team members were saying, and what he learned was surprising.

Common Mistake #2

You think the emotional climate of the environment doesn't affect productivity

One of the most important things that Cliff learned was that there were a number of people who weren't happy working in his team. He had ignored the emotional climate of the team. Quite frankly, he didn't consider that emotions were a part of work, and he believed you were to ignore emotions. How wrong he was. He now started to think of emotions as information.

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Emotions tell us what appears to be a threat, what is attractive or satisfying to us, and what will help us to meet a need. He also paid attention to the tone of voice when he spoke with people, and also to body language when he was meeting someone in-person.

What has led to the belief that emotions are not a part of the business environment?

1. We collapse the distinction between being caught in the grip of strong emotion, and being able to distinguish what information a strong emotion is telling us and acting on that information.
2. We believe that emotions are in the realm of being too personal for the business environment.
3. We're unskilled in how to deal with our own or others strong emotion such as anger, so we tip toe around them.

Cliff and I talked about emotional intelligence and relationship intelligence in some depth in our coaching sessions, and as Cliff reflected on different situations, it became apparent to him that there had been signs of people being dissatisfied. He realized how much he had to learn about these other intelligences and we focused a good deal of our coaching on increasing Cliff's self-awareness of how his emotions affected others, as well as his ability to quickly assess the emotional climate in others.

While IQ for the job you're employed to do is the entry point, it's emotional intelligence and relationship intelligence that are the most important factors in distinguishing great leadership from average leadership. Because they were hitting their business targets, there were complaints that Cliff had ignored. What Cliff now began to consider is how much more could his team accomplish if he learned how to use the emotional climate as a measure of the team's engagement? He had never considered that the happier his team members were, the more they might be engaged and invested in the team's success.

Emotional intelligence enables leaders to deal with their own internal responses, moods, and states of mind. Relationship intelligence informs how we understand and interact with others, and the behavioral and emotional impact of others on us. Leaders who have developed these intelligences are effective because they act in ways that leave people around them feeling stronger and more capable. They manage themselves effectively under stress and ambiguous circumstances. They are in touch with what their people are thinking and feeling, and are able to inspire through sharing hope and an optimistic view of the future.

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Common Mistake #3

You subordinate your values and principles for business results

Leaders often exhibit behavior and attitudes toward their team members that are different than how they treat the people they care about outside of their work environment. Why do leaders create a split personality between their business and personal lives?

1. They believe that their personal life is their own concern and doesn't (or shouldn't) affect their business performance.
2. They see themselves as two different people – the one who shows up to work, and the one who shows up outside of work.

While it makes sense to compartmentalize your business life and your personal life, it's not wise to do so at the core level of your values and principles.

One thing that Cliff became aware of was that he had compartmentalized his personal and professional life to the point where he wasn't proud of how he was treating his team members. Didn't they deserve to be respected, to have honesty from him, and to clear the air when a conflict had occurred? He gave his children all the time they needed with him when he was home. What made him think that his team members didn't require time to talk through ideas, challenges, be coached and mentored?

One thing that Cliff had to learn was how to have effective difficult conversations with people, and still be able to honor his core values of respect, honesty and giving others the benefit of the doubt. We engaged in practice conversations in our coaching, as well as having Cliff reflect on how he had handled situations in the past, including what had worked, and what could be improved.

When people see that your behavior matches your words, and embraces timeless core values and principles, they begin to trust you more. A leader has 'presence' when it is obvious that they know who they are and what is most important to them, and act in a way that is consistent with those core values and principles, inside and outside of work.

Cliff had a young child at home, and he felt the pull to spend more time at home than after hours at work, so he often left earlier than his team members. He knew that some of his team members had young children too. How often had he expected them to stay late at work, to show they were committed to their job? There were many discrepancies that Cliff began to



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notice between his actions and his words. As he began to uncover his core values and principles, his congruence and consistency between his actions and words grew. And people in his team were noticing the positive changes in him, and that in turn positively influenced them and the trust they felt in him.

Actions to Experiment with...

Focus on the 'how' of your leadership as much or more so than the 'what.'

Have you fallen in to the trap of treating everyone generically? How much do you know about the skills, talents and readiness of each team member to be able to take on more responsibility? What support do they need from you in order to continue growing their skills? Are you ready to allow team members to really shine brightly, even brighter than you?

It takes courage to accurately evaluate yourself as a leader, and to go beyond the 'what' of leadership to seeing the true difference that the 'how' of leading makes to stellar performance.

Regularly take the pulse of the emotional climate of your team.

What words would you use to describe the current emotional climate of your team? What emotion might describe each individual member of your team? Are there any conversations you are avoiding having because you don't want to (or don't know how to) deal with the emotional climate of the person?

It takes consciousness to stop and pay attention to the emotional climate of the team when so much of your attention is on fighting fires, getting the plan in place and implementation. Stellar leaders embrace the challenge of building empathetic relationships, and especially with those they have differences of opinion with.

Embrace and live your core values and principles 100% of the time.

What are your core values and principles? How would you articulate them? What would be an example of that value or principle in action – at work and at home?

When you dig down to this level, you realize that **everyone wants respect, honesty and to be given the benefit of the doubt.** And when a leader starts to see people as people – not just as the boss, a superior, a peer or a direct report – a powerful shift can occur that has the

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potential to go beyond achieving great results to lifting the whole team or organization to a new level of satisfaction and stellar performance.

### About Carly Anderson

Carly works as an executive and leadership coach in a confidential trusted advisor role with senior people including leaders, executives, managers and supervisors so they can mobilize energy in people and consistently achieve stellar performance. She has a particular affinity for working with engineers, technology and technical experts who want or need to maximize their leadership performance. She is person-focused, authentic and able to draw on a wide range of approaches, tools and techniques to suit each situation. She is the author of the S.T.A.R. performance system for leadership excellence.

As a Master Certified Coach (MCC) since 2004, she is recognized at the top of her profession for her training in the skills and application of how behavior, mindset and communication impact motivation and performance. She uncovers her clients' latent strengths and grows their ability to use them to influence, and get superior results from their people.

#### What leaders Carly has coached have said:

*"I had the privilege of working with Carly as my executive coach, during which time she worked with me personally and members of my staff. As a mid-career executive, I have been exposed to a variety of coaching and leadership development in corporate and academic settings – my work with Carly has by far been the most positive experience."*

Patrick Jabal, Senior Director,  
Strategic Partnerships, Google

*"Suffice to say that all is well on my end. I'm pleased to report that I continue to work with and hone the tools you put into my box; and that it is becoming much more intuitive for me. Quite amazing, really. I've got half-a-dozen examples I could share, but all I want to say is Carly, your coaching works."*

Programs Control Manager,  
Engineering Consulting Firm, Los Angeles

**Find out more about Stellar Leadership Performance at [www.stellarleader.com](http://www.stellarleader.com)**